



Nassau Workers Approve Pact

July 26, 2003

Nassau's largest municipal employee union has overwhelmingly approved a contract with Nassau County calling for a 2.5-percent raise this year and increases of up to 3.5 percent in each of the next four years, union officials said Friday. The contract was approved Thursday by a vote of 2,311 to 1,350, said Jane D'Amico, president of the Nassau County Local of the Civil Service Employees Association. D'Amico said she was "delighted" that she had an "unprecedented turnout" with the "vast majority of the membership" who voted approving the contract. "To be able to produce a fair and equitable agreement like this one, while taking into account the county's fiscal challenges, is nothing short of extraordinary," said Nicholas LaMorte, president of the CSEA Long Island Region.

County Executive Thomas Suozzi said he was pleased the 5,800- member union had ratified the contract, which now goes before the 19-member legislature for approval. If lawmakers approve it, Suozzi said he would sign the agreement. "The CSEA is now working with the smallest work force we have had in 30 years," Suozzi said. While I recognize that many of the members do not like the contract because it was not as generous as previous contracts, the majority recognized the county is in tough fiscal straits and they had to do their fair share."

The CSEA contract is currently under review by the Nassau Interim Finance Authority, the Nassau comptroller's office and the Legislative Office of Budget Review. NIFA officials said they would look closely at the \$25 million a year in savings administration officials say the contract would achieve for the cash-strapped county.

The contract includes a raise for each of the next four years of between 2.5 percent and 3.5 percent, depending on the cost of living for the New York area. Union officials said Friday that the contract provides a hazardous duty pay provision for some county workers, including medical technicians, and those with police and peace officer status. The agreement also provides for 100 percent paid health benefits for county employees.

In the agreement, Nassau County extended health insurance and other benefits to the domestic partners of its employees, including those in gay and lesbian relationships, to match benefits available to married couples.

Under the contract, Suozzi also has agreed not to lay off employees should a sewer storm-water authority be approved by state lawmakers. Suozzi has said that if the authority is not approved, he may have to lay off hundreds of workers.

By consolidating 30 existing sewer districts and allowing Nassau to take advantage of lower financing rates through the state's Environmental Facilities Corp., the county would save an estimated \$25 million a year, Suozzi said.

State senators balked at the proposed legislation earlier this year. Republicans, who control the State Senate, questioned the amount that would be saved and they argued that the authority would tax residents twice by moving 136 employees from the county public works department to the authority without a corresponding cut in general fund spending.

Legislative Presiding Officer Judy Jacobs (D-Woodbury) said lawmakers would call a special meeting in August once the reviews are complete.

"When we review the contract, I want lawmakers who have questions to get advice from experts who have reviewed it," Jacobs said.